

## ABOUT ME

I was born and raised in Racine, Wisconsin; a sizeable urban city known for the William Horlick Company (the inventor of malted milk), J. I. Case (a company with which those of you from farming communities are likely familiar), InSinkErator (inventor of the “garbage disposal”), and, of course, S. C. Johnson and Sons (aka Johnson’s Wax). It is also the home to the Racine Raiders, the winningest semi-pro football team ever; and thanks to its large Danish population, to the truly glorious Danish pastry known as kringle.

One other noteworthy thing about Racine is that it has always been an area known for innovation in education. John G. McMynn established one of the earliest public school systems in the state in Racine, and the now defunct Racine College was one of the earliest colleges in the state as well. Racine’s school desegregation program (in 1975!—yes, you read that correctly; most school systems were *still* significantly segregated then) was held up by the U.S. Department of Education and the New York Times as a model for the nation. Racine has also been a prime location for the development of alternative education programs in the 1970s and beyond. Thanks to this, I have had the good fortune of attending two nationally recognized alternative education programs. After two miserable years of kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade at the traditional Gilbert Knapp Elementary School, on the recommendation of a school counselor, my mother had me transferred to a still relatively new alternative elementary school, Red Apple. Currently, the school has a significant STEAM (STEM + Arts) focus; at the time it followed elements of an open education program, where the student’s curriculum was more significantly guided by their own interests and classes were multi-graded. (They had originally wanted to eliminate grade levels altogether, but this was nixed by the school district.) From there, I transferred to Walden III for middle and high school. Walden III’s program was a combination of establishing a family atmosphere to the school (for example, everyone at the school, even the Principal, was referred to by their first name), focusing on developing intellectual skills, providing greater freedom, independence, and responsibility for the students, and like Red Apple more individualized learning. It was also an early mastery school, and its graduation portfolio (the Rite of Passage Experience--which consists of writing numerous reflective essays, writing an autobiography, performing and reporting on an original science experiment, doing community service, and doing presentations to a committee on what one has learned) is the oldest comprehensive graduation portfolio in the U.S., and a major influence on and model for the movement in education toward authentic assessment.

After graduating high school, I attended the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, originally as a Pre-Med student. (It had, and still has, one of the most successful Pre-Med programs in the nation.) But during my first semester there, in Intro to Philosophy with Wayne Johnson, I was bit and incurably infected with the philosophy bug. In the end, after a 5-year stint there, I graduated in 1995 *cum laude* with a B.A. in Philosophy and a B.S. in Psychology, both with honors. I was the first, and to date, still the only philosophy major in Parkside’s history to earn a doctoral degree in that field. I was very heavily involved in student life at Parkside. I served in officer positions in L’ Alliance des Amis (French Club), Psychology Club, and of course, the Parkside Philosophical Society. I was also involved in the Club for International Affairs (participating in a Model Arab League on behalf of the college once and helping with its own Model Organization of American States for regional high schools), the Parkside Association of Wargamers, and writing for its short-lived alternative paper, *The First Amendment*. I served 3 years in the Parkside Student Government Association, as a Senator, representative to the Student Organization Council, President Pro-Tempore (V.P. of the Senate), and Associate Justice, twice being honored with their annual Outstanding Service Award. The college also awarded me one of their two Emerging Leader Awards for the 1991-92 school year.

I did my graduate education in philosophy at Loyola University of Chicago on a 4-year Graduate Fellowship and Graduate Assistantship. Among the excellent philosophers under whom I studied there are Thomas L. Carson, the late Sue Cunningham, David Ingram, Paul K. Moser, Jennifer A. Parks, David Schweickart, the late Leo Sweeney, S.J., J. D. Trout, and the late Dick Westley. I earned an M.A. in January of 1998 with a thesis defending the “presumption of atheism” (a view I would no longer endorse—not an unusual phenomenon in my field). I spent the next 5 years finishing my last year and a half of courses, working full-time, teaching part-time, and being a father to my young son. I finally defended my dissertation (an explanatory defense of philosophical naturalism) in the summer of 2003.

My experiences first through Red Apple and Walden III, and later at Parkside have led me to recommend a few things to my own students to greatly enhance their own educational experience. First, and obviously, get involved. Being involved in student organizations and campus life will make your college (or *any* school) experience so much more meaningful. (And this isn’t just something I’m passing on from personal experience—research continually shows that being involved in student life is positively correlated with school satisfaction, completion rates, and even grades.) Second, take the time to interact with your teachers and professors outside of class, especially those in your major area of study or other areas of interest. You can easily learn as much, maybe even more, in informal discussions with them as you will in the classroom. Lastly, don’t place limits on your education. Take classes outside your major to broaden your knowledge and understanding; if finances permit, take classes solely out of interest even if they don’t necessarily fill gen ed requirements; and, of course, don’t confine your learning to your courses but independently follow up on other topics of interest.

Within academia, I served as a Lecturer in Philosophy (part-time) at Loyola from 1998-2000, Adjunct Professor of Philosophy (part-time) at College of Lake County in Grayslake, IL from 1999-2006, and since 2006, as Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies here at I.V.C.C. My doctoral dissertation was published in 2007 (though it did not sell very many copies), and I’ve published professional journal essays in the areas of philosophy of mind, political philosophy, applied ethics, and philosophy of religion. From 2000-2003, I was one of the regular reviewers of books in the areas of philosophy of religion and philosophy of mind for the journal *Teaching Philosophy*. Outside of academia, besides the usual high school and college fast food jobs, I worked for a year in the lab at a metal refinery and for 4 years as a certified pharmacy technician.

The courses I teach here are Introduction to Philosophy, Ethics, Comparative Religion, Philosophy of Religion, and Logic (Critical Thinking). My own educational background and interests certainly affects some of what I do in these courses. In Logic and the critical thinking portion of Ethics, I like to include an examination of things like cognitive biases; and in Intro I focus on views that challenge those things which we normally take for granted. My grading system was inspired by the use of descriptive grades at Walden III, and the nearly exclusive emphasis on constructed answer coursework is definitely inspired by having attended alternative schools for so long.

Besides my teaching areas, my other areas of research interest are: within philosophy, Existentialism (especially Nietzsche and Kierkegaard), liberation philosophies, and political philosophy; within psychology, cognitive psychology/psychology of human judgment, social psychology, and psychology and sociology of human sexuality; and outside of those fields, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, 1980s Film and Music, and unsurprisingly given my background, the Alternative Education Movement.

At I.V.C.C., I serve as a faculty co-sponsor for G.S.A. and Socrates Café, and as the faculty sponsor for Round Table Gaming and OSAKA (Anime Club).

A visit to my office will quickly reveal how deeply connected I am to “nerd culture”. I was playing Dungeons and Dragons as far back as the first edition of *Basic*, and my childhood was steeped in role-playing games. (Among my other favorites were Marvel Super Heroes, Call of Cthulhu, Star Frontiers, Gamma World, Top Secret, and Battletech.) I sometimes (only half-jokingly) credit the “Satanic Panic” around D&D in the 1980s with pushing me in the direction of going into philosophy by revealing that most adults really didn’t know what they were talking about. That, and my tendency to ask difficult and uncomfortable questions regarding religion (which led one Sunday School program to request of my father that he no longer bring me) did likely start steering me toward my eventual academic field. (In high school I even joked that I would be a guru when I grew up, giving advice to misguided fools; the joke, apparently, is on me.) I played video and computer games voraciously as a youth (The Bard’s Tale being my favorite), and was quite the computer whiz for a time, at least up through the Apple IIe. (Since then, that skill has rather languished due to more focus on academic study.) To put it into historical context, my first video game system was the Atari 2600, and my first computer the infamously shoddy Radio Shack TRS-80. I’ve been an avid reader of Marvel comics since the mid-80s, though after college it’s mostly been the X-titles. I’ve been a Star Wars fan practically my entire life, since seeing the original in its 1979 re-release. (As a youth, I saw *The Empire Strikes Back* so many times that at one point I had the entire dialogue of the film memorized.) My junior high years were filled with Tolkien and Douglas Adams, and my high school years with Lovecraft and Vonnegut. I’m a long-time fan of the Steelers, Buccaneers (even during those dreadful years in the 80s and early 90s), and Packers in football; and at least back when I watched it regularly of the Cubs and Brewers in baseball. Other things I enjoy greatly are post-punk, New Wave and early electronic music, free jazz, 80s teen films (I make sure to re-watch *The Breakfast Club* and *Heathers* annually), European literature from about 1860-1960, Latin American literature (especially Chilean poets), and pro wrestling. I’m currently serving as an unofficial historian for Walden III, and plan to hopefully someday publish (at least online) a history of the school.